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International Society for the History, Philosophy and Social Studies of Biology

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

As I start to make my plans to participate in ISHPSSB 2023 in Toronto, I find myself reflecting on why people attend our conference and belong to this society. ISHPSSB was formed in 1989 specifically in order to hold a biennial meeting. There are now more professional societies in our fields than ever before, as well as a fabulous array of free-standing workshops and thematic events which we can choose to attend, particularly as many of us pursue increasingly interdisciplinary approaches and diverse research topics. So what does an ISHPSSB conference provide that makes it a priority to attend for so many of us?

The typical responses to this question hinge partially on the clear focus of our society on scholarship related to the life sciences, broadly construed, as well as the inclusion of diverse methods including not only history and philosophy but also social studies and the biological sciences themselves. But the additional characteristics of ISHPSSB often noted by attendees relate to its core values of collegiality, openness, and inclusiveness, which are particularly attractive to early career scholars and (post)graduate students, independent scholars, and those seeking to learn more about our fields, as well as those working in various locations and languages. We enjoy seeing each other, exchanging ideas, and socialising: this is one important reason why ISHPSSB takes place over a rather leisurely week rather than a compressed long weekend.

However, the Council has begun to discuss whether a face-to-face biennial meeting is the best way to pursue these goals and how we should incorporate consideration of other important issues in our planning, including environmental concerns and rising travel and other costs particularly in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Our excellent online conference in 2021 hosted by Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory was explicitly undertaken as a one-off arrangement pursued out of necessity, but not as reflective of our general preference as a membership to meet face-to-face. The Toronto meeting will include hybrid options for presentations but has prioritised face-to-face attendance and experiences for networking and similar. But what should the ISHPSSB meeting look like in the future, both in the short and longer term?

Many academics are consciously limiting their travel, particularly long-distance air travel (oh, to have the option to take a train, writes your president from down under!). Some institutions are even establishing policies to decrease or eliminate this type of travel as it seems to be in tension with efforts to foster greater sustainability. Limited available evidence, largely gathered at individual universities, appears to indicate that there are no strong associations between the emissions created through travel and the productivity of individual academics (as measured by citations and hindex, which admittedly are less relevant for many humanities and social science scholars), nor is air travel positively related to collaborations with other academics (e.g., see Richler, J. 2019. Academic air travel. Nature Climate Change 9: 434). Initiatives such as Philosophers for Sustainability are developing strategies to encourage behavioural change and leadership on climate change and environmental sustainability, not only because of the large and arguably disproportionate carbon footprint of academics, but also due to the disproportionate impact of climate change on many of the groups that are underrepresented in academia (and in this case, especially in philosophy).

We also must be aware that costs of conference participation may well exceed the available resources for many scholars in less wealthy locations or institutions, which is particularly relevant as ISHPSSB is an international society heavily based in the humanities which are traditionally underresourced fields. This situation is likely to be exacerbated with rising costs resulting from the pandemic and global travel disruption. Those with significant carer responsibilities or those for whom travel in general or to specific locations is difficult or impossible are necessarily excluded when we only have a face-to-face meeting. As an organisation, ISHPSSB has long been aware of these issues, and seeks to address some of them by providing support for students and independent scholars (from our funds and with a NSF grant), and ensuring that selected conference sites are physically accessible and do not have overly onerous visa or other entrance conditions, as well as by supporting off-year workshops and rotating the location of conferences across various continents. Most recently, we approved a Resolution on Abortion Access and Hostile Environments which expanded our historical commitment to avoid meeting in places known to be unwelcoming, discriminatory, or hostile to persons with disabilities, LGBTQ+ persons, and persons of particular national origins to include a review of all conference site proposals to ensure that we meet only at locations where attendees will not face an unwelcoming, discriminatory, hostile, or unaccommodating environment which includes consideration of access to abortion and other healthcare services.

Although conference registration and membership fees have traditionally been low compared to most other professional organisations and have included student and independent scholar rates, we are introducing a tiered registration system for the Toronto meeting according to country of residence to partially offset the very real differences in economics and available academic travel support amongst our members and attendees. But these initiatives still do not fully address the even deeper issues associated with the potential adverse effects of having face-to-face attendance as our main mode of participation. As some critics have noted, the continued reliance on conferences that require travel could be viewed as discrediting our claims to desiring greater gender equity, given that carer and domestic responsibilities still fall disproportionately to women in many locales, and inhibits many from participating in academic discourse including those in less research intensive settings, which in turn affects not only individual scholarship but our collective research efforts in the field.

Among the suggestions proposed for consideration with regard to ISHPSSB are that we continue to employ hybrid approaches to conferences (supporting online and in-person presentations). However this requirement may limit the viability of certain sites to host and requires significant effort, particularly if we wish to recreate many of the experiences that typically occur in a face-to-face setting. Similarly, greater attention to other aspects of sustainability in the hosting of conferences is clearly desirable, for instance in catering and local transportation, but may be difficult to implement when we rotate locations for every conference, and could add significant expense, which in turn would exacerbate the inequities in access noted above. More off-year workshops, or development of more frequent regional activities or similar, could partially help to fill the gaps created by voluntary or involuntary limitations on travel to biennial meetings, but may result in diluting the international reach and coherence of ISHPSSB as an organisation.

What are your suggestions about the future of the ISHPSSB conference and the organisation more generally? We will hold a forum at the Toronto meeting to openly discuss these and other issues related to best fulfilling our members' needs, and welcome your contributions in advance, particularly to help to structure this session. As trite as it may sound, the future of ISHPSSB is only as strong as its members' commitment, contributions, and creativity in these rapidly changing times.

Rachel A. Ankeny President

ISHPSSB 2023 MEETING IN TORONTO

Call for Abstracts ISHPSSB 2023

9–15 JULY 2023 University of Toronto and Western University Ontario

We invite submissions for the next International Society for the History, Philosophy and Social Studies of Biology biennial meeting, which will take place in Toronto, Canada, 9–15 July 2023.

Returning to in-person meetings after the four-year hiatus, the Council, Local Organizing, and Program Committees are working to put together an exciting program inspired by socially relevant work on biology and the life sciences, contemporary challenges of climate change and the pandemics, the growing global interests into indigenous ways of knowing, and knowledge and concerns of the local communities living in the Toronto and Ontario area and around the Great Lakes. To do so, we are building on the ISHPSSB membership; keynote lecture and a panel that will highlight these themes, the strengths of local communities of scholars in HPS, the social studies of science, sciences and museum studies; and exploring new and established topics through engaging and innovative formats.

As our keynote speaker, Deborah McGregor (York University) will present on climate and environmental justice, and an interdisciplinary public panel will discuss how environmental degradation, indigeneity, human right to water and health all intersect in and around the Great Lakes. The panelists are Patricia Corcoran (University of Western Ontario), Blaire Morseau (University of Massachusetts Boston), Jennifer Read (University of Michigan), and Marsha Richmond (Wayne State University). These conversations will be complemented with a tour of the Royal Ontario Museum natural history and world cultures collections, walking through the causes, consequences and solutions to climate crisis.

<u>Please visit the conference website to submit your</u> abstracts. Registration will open soon.

For any inquiries about the program of the conference, write to program@ishpssb.org, and for questions for the local organisers to local-organisers@ishpssb.org.

Important dates:

- November 2022–31 January 2023: Submissions open for all submission formats
- December 2022: Open Session Board opens
- 31 January 2023: Deadline for all submission formats
- 31 March 2023: Final notification of acceptance for all formats
- 07 May 2023: Deadline for early registration
- 08 May 2023-7 June 2023: Late registration
- 14 June 2023: Program posted online

Tatjana Buklijas and Jan Baedke Co-Chairs of the ISHPSSB 2023 Program Committee

CALL FOR PROPOSALS FOR HOSTING THE ISHPSSB 2027

MEETING

ISHPSSB Members are invited to submit expressions of interest for hosting the 2027 Meeting. Our tradition of alternating sites suggests that the 2027 Meeting should be held in Latin America, Asia, the Pacific, or Africa. A location that can be easily accessed by rail, bus or car for many members is especially desirable to minimize our carbon footprint.

Expressions of interest may be sent to the Site Selection Committee Chair, Betty Smocovitis at bsmocovi@ufl.edu. She is happy to help answer questions about hosting the 2027 meeting.

Betty Smocovitis Chair of the Site Selection Committee

2023 DAVID HULL PRIZE: CALL

FOR PROPOSALS

The David L. Hull Prize is a biennial prize established in 2011 by ISHPSSB to honor the life and legacy of David L. Hull (1935–2010). It is awarded to an individual who has made extraordinary contributions to scholarship and service in ways that promote interdisciplinary connections between history, philosophy, social studies, and biology and foster the careers of younger scholars. These are strengths that reflect the contributions of David Hull to our professions and to our Society.

Nominations for the Hull Prize are now open for consideration by the 2023 David Hull Prize Committee. The nomination packet should include the following materials:

- 1) Nominator's name and email address,
- 2) nominee's name and email address,
- 3) full CV of the nominee,
- 4) citation text (maximum of 1000 words),
- 5) and a minimum of two and a maximum of four letters of nomination, each signed by at least one member of ISHPSSB.

Those who submitted nominations in the last recent past are encouraged to resubmit an updated nomination packet.

Nomination packets should be sent as PDF attachments to the chair of the 2023 David Hull Prize Committee, Prof. Marsha Richmond (marsha.richmond@wayne.edu), with "Hull Prize" in the subject heading. Nominations should be received no later than 15 February 2023. The Hull Prize Committee will inform the nominator of the outcome of their decision process in late March/early April. *Marsha Richmond Chair of the David L. Hull Prize Committee*

BENJAMIN BRADLEY'S DARWIN'S PSYCHOLOGY. INTERVIEW BY BRIAN

MCLOONE



BM*:

There's been a great deal of recent work in biology and philosophy of biology that (re-)emphasizes the uniqueness and importance of organisms, and their agency, when thinking about evolution. I take the central argument of your book to be that one can find many of these themes in Darwin, and that this is particularly true with regards to Darwin's work in psychology, as exemplified in *Descent* and *Expression*. Is that a fair assessment?

BB:

Organisms are the centrepiece of a broad revision of evolutionary theory taking place over recent years. The Huxley-Dawkins-Dennett gene's-eye view of natural selection proved an audacious, almost-comical, attempt to boil down Darwin's multivalent and deeply-thoughtout texts into a single idea. As the chutzpah wears off, reality reasserts itself. Or, better, Darwin reasserts himself. Because, as biologists recognise the true complexity of the many different processes which result in evolution, they are also rediscovering the necessity of the suite of concepts Darwin himself had to deploy in constructing Origin. These include: hierarchical organisation (with whole organisms coming first); inheritance as the development, not just the transmission, of heritable particles; (phenotypic) plasticity (a term Darwin himself used); coadaptation; the so-called 'Baldwin effect' (which Baldwin found in Darwin's 'transitional habits'); multi-level selection; mutual aid; the special status of 'social animals'; and

the interdependencies interlacing habits with habitat. Because organisms are above all agents, and agency is essentially psychological, we must engage with this entire suite of concepts when we read Darwin on psychological topics.

BM:

You claim that the real causal work that occurs in evolution is in the "theater of agency," and that natural selection is not a cause. Can you explain what you mean by that?

BB:

That's what Darwin claims. According to Origin, Natural Selection is an effect of other processes, which it discusses under the headings: inheritance; variation; and the struggle for existence. Reading Darwin's books is never straightforward however. Gillian Beer compares them to Dickens, their superfluity of material only revealing itself as order retrospectively. The first edition of Origin in particular is by turns factual and metaphorical, logical and speculative, allusive and rhetorical, stuffed with characters, stories and anecdotes both imaginary and real. As we read, the book constructs different voices to address different audiences: colleagues, creationists, curious naturalists and us-posterity. Nor do the voices all say the same thing. This makes it perfectly possible to find rhetoric which supports a view of Selection as a causal power silently working to improve each species, like some omniscient stud-farmer. But if we look to the overarching argument of the book, and the ways it most carefully summarises its conclusions, we find natural selection is presented as, and called, 'a result' or 'a consequence' of other processes.

Under the sway of gene's-eye biology, historians of science have long supported a causal interpretation of natural selection from their reading of *Origin*'s context, and claims about Darwin's letters and notes. When I dug down I found their evidence almost non-existent, mostly amounting to the first third of a postscript to a letter Darwin wrote in 1863.** Consider *all* the available ancillary material, and we find Darwin stoutly resisted a causal take on Selection. In fact, several amendments to later editions of *Origin* explicitly reinforce the view that Natural Selection is *not* a cause in its own right.

* Brian McLoone (BM) questions and Benjamin Bradley (BB) answers.

** Bradley, B. 2022. Natural selection according to Darwin: Cause or effect? History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences, 44, 13.

So: *what are* the causal processes from which selection results? Most obviously, they are the everyday activities of organisms in a given habitat. I say these comprise a 'theater of agency' to catch the way Darwin insists that even plants, even inorganic processes, function as agents where adaptation and coadaptation are concerned. And, Darwin stresses, actions cause reactions which weave the activities of agents into an 'infinitely complex' web of relations. It is the dynamics of this web which both create variation and constitute the struggle for existence that winnows fitter variants from the less fit.

BM:

Darwin was first and foremost a biologist, but Darwin did an enormous amount of work in psychology, as you thoroughly document. Despite this, in his day (and ours) Darwin is seldom described as being a psychologist in addition to being a biologist. Why is that?

BB:

A defining gesture made by the psychology born when behaviourism took it into the laboratory, was to renounce natural history in general and Darwin in particular. Even evolution got short shrift from then on. But the idea of basing psychology *on a descriptive base* proved absolute anathema—creating the vacuum into which ethology stepped. Without solid descriptive foundation, modern psychology has proved to have little sense of intrinsic scientific worth and, hence, seeks an 'external locus of control.'

First it was physics-envy: laboratories, experiments, operational definition, computability, and the billiard balls of stimulus and response. Then, when sociobiology came along, a new sense of lack ignited. Again psychologists felt they were playing catch-up, so they grabbed what the desired Other seemed most to value—which, in the mid-1970s, was gene's-eye biology. As Richard Dawkins frankly admits, scientists like him praise Darwin, but they do not read Darwin. So today we get evolutionary psychologist David Buss saying that science has had to wait 150 years for anyone —meaning he and his colleagues—to fulfil *Origin*'s promise to set psychology 'on a new foundation.'

Call it 'narrative blindness': the accepted story of psychology's origins constructs a past in which Darwin's psychological project has no place. Yet that project was the culmination of Darwin's work. He needed to prove that even the most quintessentially human qualities—aesthetic refinement, conscience, language, advanced intellectual powers—had an evolved basis. His post-*Origin* publications do just that.

Amusingly, the stand-off between Darwin and psychology was mutual. Darwin had little time for psychologists—because they were such inadequate observers and describers. Privately, he derided the deductive approaches of two men now hailed as 'founding fathers': Spencer and Bain. His books ignore psychological research. And *Descent* damns anyone who dismisses observational evidence on the grounds that 'because you can give two things different names, they must therefore have different natures.'

BM:

Chapter 8 is about cultural evolution, and you write that Darwin's psychology "neither proposes that culture evolves, nor that culture occupies a domain separate from but parallel to that of biological evolution" (p. 289). You then immediately note that one exception is Darwin's discussion, in *Descent*, of language evolution as being analogous to biological evolution. Yet it seems another exception may be Darwin's comparison of cultural sophistication. As you describe, Darwin believed Victorian England was the most sophisticated culture in the world, with the "savages" of Tierra del Fuego (for instance) on the other end of the spectrum. Doesn't this imply that Darwin does believe cultures evolve?

BB:

I stress again: Darwin's books are never all of one piece. He did make some disgustingly racist remarks, just as he made some outrageously sexist remarks. Yet he also opposed slavery, and suggested that women are more highly evolved than men because they show more moral sympathy and unselfishness. Regarding the qualities he exalted in 'the civilized races,' he held these had less to do with natural selection than with the civilising effect of schooling, religion, science, and private property. Which made cultural progress fragile: the 'old Greeks' temporarily stood 'some grades higher in intellect than any race that has ever existed,' yet later 'retrograded.' Darwin was also struck by the three Fuegians who had previously been kidnapped by Captain Fitzroy of the Beagle and taken to England to be civilised. Three years later they sailed back to South America alongside Darwin, fully Europeanised,

'resembling us in disposition and in most of our mental faculties.' Yet, within weeks of landing back among their kinfolk, they too had 'retrograded.'

Brian McLoone

Member of the Student Advisory Committee

STUDENT ADVISORY

COMMITTEE

ISHPSSB students! Do you have concerns or ideas for the upcoming conference? Want to get involved in the Student Advisory Committee? Email Jacqueline Wallis (jacqwa@sas.upenn.edu) or join the Slack group here: https://join.slack.com/t/ishstudentcommittee/ shared_invite/zt-1jwdoq2tdd6CmyOaRDKMscCw8B3UrXA.

Jacqueline Wallis Chair of the Student Advisory Committee

MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

COMMITTEE

In addition to adjudicating the Interdisciplinary Organized Session Prize during conference years, the Membership Development Committee has taken on four additional tasks, the work on some of which is still in progress:

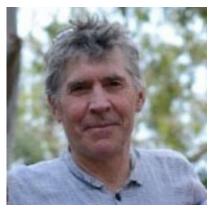
- Setting up a list of relevant societies (and their email lists) worldwide, so as to be able to distribute the ISHPSSB conference call for papers to various countries/global regions and to different disciplines.
 Drafting guidelines for presentations and discussions in English that are inclusive for non-native
- speakers, to be included in future conference programs.
- 3) Setting up a survey on multilingual sessions for the whole ISHPSSB membership, which is to inquire about the interests in multilingual sessions (especially among non-native speakers of English), what languages to permit, and how to handle submission, title/abstract in the program, verbal discussions, and slides for such sessions.
- 4) Comparing in-person and remote meetings regarding the participation of underrepresented countries and global regions (with an eye toward the merits of hybrid meetings). A report has been prepared that analyzes the data for the 2015 (Montréal), 2017 (São Paulo), 2019 (Oslo), and 2021

(online) meetings and discusses the merits and drawbacks of in-person and hybrid meetings. We hope that the results of these initiatives will contribute relevant information to the program chairs and Council so as to create a more inclusive Society. *Ingo Brigandt and Vivette García Deister Co-Chairs of the Membership Development Committee*

PETER J. TAYLOR (1944–2019)

We are saddened to belatedly report the sudden death of Peter Taylor on October 29, 2019 from a rare sarcoma that turned extremely aggressive within a few days after diagnosis. Born in Melbourne, he graduated from Monash University (Australia) in 1975 with a Bachelor of Science with Honours in Biomathematics and Zoology. During his undergraduate years, Peter was co-editor of the Monash student newspaper, "Lot's Wife," and was an activist deeply committed to social and environmental justice. This commitment remained integral to his future thinking, scholarship, teaching, and daily life. Peter later described the influences of these experiences in a Practitioner's Portfolio summarising his work as follows: "As a young environmental and political activist in Australia in the 1970s I was involved in a wide range of actions—from working with trade unionists to oppose the construction of an inner-city power plant through campaigning against excess packaging to establishing a natural foods co-operative. However, when someone asked me: 'If you could wish for one thing to be changed when you wake up tomorrow, what would it be?' my answer was not a concrete political success or environmental improvement. I replied simply: 'I would want everyone to question,' by which I meant not to be merely sceptical, but to consider alternatives to accepted views and practices."

Peter moved to the United States in 1980 and was awarded a doctoral scholarship to study at Harvard University, earning a PhD in Organismic &



Evolutionary Biology in 1985. During this time at Harvard, he met his future wife, Ann Blum, while she was working in Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology. Peter was a Mellon Fellow in Science, Technology & Society at Massachusetts Institute of Technology from 1985–86, and in 1990 joined the Program on Science, Technology & Society (later the Department of Science & Technology Studies) at Cornell University where he was an assistant professor till 1997. Peter then taught at University of Massachusetts Boston from 1998 till his death, and most recently was Professor and Director of the Critical & Creative Thinking Program in the Graduate College of Education, as well as Director of the Science in the Changing World graduate track and of the undergraduate program in Science, Technology, and Values. Peter was the author of 6 books, 29 chapters, and numerous articles in his diverse fields of interest, which were critical reflections on the life sciences, particularly in relation to complexity and sociohistorical phenomena, and science education, and received several grants from the U.S. National Science Foundation relating to these topics. He was a visiting professor across the globe in both scientific and HPS/ STS-related departments, including positions in Mexico (UNAM), Finland (University of Helsinki), Austria (KLI), and Australia, and several U.S. institutions including Brown, Swarthmore, Rutgers, Yale, and the University of California at Berkeley, as well as being a Fulbright scholar in Portugal. His ability to inspire students to think critically is legendary, and will be his enduring legacy in addition to his voluminous publications.

Peter described the "most significant venue" for him outside of his formal appointments as being the International Society for History, Philosophy and Social Studies of Biology (ISHPSSB). He served first on the program committee (1987-89) and as program organizer (1989–91), and later on the Executive from 1993–99 as President-elect, President, and then past-President. It was during this period that the society was being formalized, and Peter among others worked hard to ensure that this type of institutionalization did not undermine the long-standing ISHPSSB traditions of fostering innovative and cross-disciplinary sessions and discussions. He continued to organize sessions at nearly every ISHPSSB meeting, which led to five special issues in scholarly journals including one on pictorial representation in biology (jointly with his wife Ann Blum) in Biology and Philosophy (1991) which became a classic resource on these issues.

Peter's 2005 book, Unruly Complexity: Ecology, Interpretation, Engagement (published by University of Chicago Press) brought together a number of key themes from Peter's work associated with concepts related to complexity and change. He defined 'unruly complexity' as associated with situations that do not have clearly defined boundaries, coherent internal dynamics, or simply mediated relations with their external context which arise whenever there is ongoing change in the structure of situations that have built up over time from heterogeneous components and are embedded or situated within wider dynamics. The book explores the significance of unruly complexity in three realms: ecology and socio-environmental change; interactions among researchers and other social agents as they establish what counts as knowledge; and efforts to feed interpretations of those interactions into ecological research in order to link knowledge-making, interpretation, and social change.

Peter was noted for his brilliant intellect, but he was also a most gentle and kind man, a wonderful father, husband, brother, and son, and loyal friend. He was predeceased by his wife Ann Blum and is survived by his son Vann Taylor, his fiancée Barbara Mawn, and his mother Evelyn J. Taylor, in additional to numerous other family members who together have established the Peter J. Taylor Memorial Scholarship at UMass Boston. As his family noted in his obituary, "Peter had big feet, a generous heart, an insatiable curiosity, and a rare mind. He will be sadly missed." He also will be sorely missed by those of us in ISHPSSB who benefitted from his openness, commitment, and collegiality.

Information gathered from various sources including an obituary published by Boston Globe (2 November 2019), Peter Taylor's curriculum vitae available at http://www.faculty.umb.edu/peter_taylor/, and his *Practitioner's Portfolio* available at http:// www.faculty.umb.edu/peter_taylor/portfolio05.html.

The Backpage

OFFICERS AND COUNCIL MEMBERS 2021–2023

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Rachel A. Ankeny (President) rachel.ankeny@adelaide.edu.au

Betty Smocovitis (President Elect) bsmocovi@ufl.edu

> Don Opitz (Treasurer) don.opitz@depaul.edu

Sarah Roe (Secretary) secretary@ishpssb.org

Greg Radick (Past President) G.M.Radick@leeds.ac.uk

Jan Baedke (Program Co-Chair) jan.baedke@rub.de

Tatjana Buklijas (Program Co-Chair) t.buklijas@auckland.ac.nz

Council Members

Jenny Bangham (2019–23) jb252@cam.ac.uk

Vivette García Deister (2019–23) vivettegarcia@ciencias.unam.mx

Abigail Nieves Delgado (2021–25) abigailnievesdelgado@gmail.com

Maria Elice de Brzezinski Prestes (2021–25) eprestes@ib.usp.br

> Thomas Reydon (2021–25) reydon@ww.uni-hannover.de

Joeri Witteveen (2019–23) jw@ind.ku.dk

Jacqueline Wallis (Student representative) jacqwa@sas.upenn.edu

Are you subscribed to the ISHPSSB Listserv <ISHPSB-L>?

If not, you may have missed information posted for members which is not included in the newsletter, such as positions announced, grant and funding opportunities, calls for papers, etc. Subscribe online by following these instructions:

Send an email message to:

LISTSERV@lists.umn.edu

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Check for updates online: https://www.ishpssb.org

This listserv is maintained by Lloyd Ackert. If you want to submit something, write to him under: moderator@ishpssb.org

Have you renewed your membership?

ISHPSSB members receive lower registration rates to attend the biennial meeting. Members who renew by April 1st in odd-numbered years can also participate in the Society election held in May prior to the biennial meeting. To renew your membership, go to: https://ishpssb.org/membership and click on "Renew my membership."

If your membership has expired, click on "Join or renew ISHPSSB membership."

If you experience any difficulties, contact the Secretary at secretary@ishpssb.org

As a benefit, members are able to subscribe to a variety of journals at reduced rates; see the information under "Membership Benefits."

Credits

This newsletter was edited by David Suárez Pascal employing GNU Emacs and Scribus (both open source and freely available). I thank Rachel Ankeny for proofreading it and to all the ISH members who kindly contributed to this issue with their texts.

The logo of the society was generously contributed by Andrew Yang.

Submissions for the newsletter should be addressed at: newsletter@ishpssb.org